

# What Is an Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm?

he aorta is the main artery of the chest and abdomen that carries blood from the heart to other areas in the body including the legs and feet. An aneurysm occurs when you have bulging of an artery wall. An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is the bulging or "ballooning" of the aorta in your abdominal area.

#### What Causes an AAA?

An AAA happens when there is a breakdown of proteins in the aortic wall. Proteins

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Lifesaving Tips About ... High Blood Pressure and PAD
- What Is Aortic Dissection (AD)?

provide structure to the aortic wall, much like poles prop up a tent or an umbrella. Weak proteins provide less structure for the aorta, which causes it to steadily expand like a balloon over time.

## What Are the Symptoms of an AAA?

In most cases, AAAs do not have any major symptoms. However, some people report feeling:

- Pain in the chest, abdominal area, back, or side
- Nausea
- Significant pulsating in their abdomen
- Numbness or "coldness" and tingling in hands or feet

## What Is a Ruptured Aneurysm?

When an aneurysm ruptures (bursts), it is a medical emergency. You will need surgery right away. Here are the signs and symptoms of a ruptured AAA:

- Sudden, severe, and constant pain in the abdomen or back
- · Loss of consciousness or passing out
- Clammy skin
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fast heartbeat

#### WHAT ARE THE RISK **FACTORS?**

The risk of an AAA increases with age. It's more common in people who are ages 60 and older. Here are some other common risk factors:



• Tobacco use. People who smoke or use tobacco are eight times more likely to be affected than nonusers.



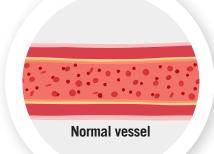
Being male. AAAs are five to 10 times more common in men than in women. In addition, ruptured aneurysms are the 10th leading cause of death in men ages 50 and older.



High blood pressure or peripheral artery disease.

## **How Are Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms Diagnosed?**

Most patients have no symptoms. If you are at risk, make sure to discuss AAA with your health care provider. Although AAAs can be detected during a regular physical examination, most are diagnosed with an ultrasound or CT (computed tomography) scan.



**Aneurysm** 

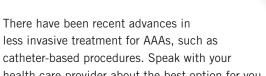
## **Learn About Treatment** and Recovery

You'll need surgery if the AAA is larger than the size of a lemon. Most patients stay in the hospital for a few days after the procedure and make a full recovery within one to two months. Your health care provider's decision to repair the AAA will likely depend on these factors:

- Risk for rupture, or AAA breaking
- How quickly it's growing
- Surgical or procedure risks due to a previous medical condition

There have been recent advances in less invasive treatment for AAAs, such as catheter-based procedures. Speak with your health care provider about the best option for you.

The combination of early diagnosis with safer, simpler, and more successful treatments can prevent deaths due to ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms.



Questions for Your Doctor	
It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.	OL SAPAROLES OF THE SAP